

# The syntax of noun phrase internal lexical possessors in Tundra Nenets

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## 1 Introduction: Lexical possessors in Tundra Nenets

Tundra Nenets (TN; Samoyedic, Uralic; Russia) has two types of lexical possessors which are internal to the DP (Nikolaeva 2014, Nikolaeva & Bárány to appear).

- Both types of lexical possessors are in the **genitive**: (1a,b)
- **Only one type controls agreement** on the possessed noun: (1b)

- (1) a. *Maša-h wā́sako*  
Masha-GEN husband  
'Masha's husband'
- b. *Maša-h wā́sako-da*  
Masha-GEN husband-3SG  
'Masha's husband'

The two types of lexical possessors differ in another syntactic property:

- Regular lexical possessors are **lower in the DP** and **follow demonstratives**: (2a)
- Possessors controlling agreement are **higher in the DP** and **precede demonstratives**: (2b)

- (2) a. *t'uku° Wera-h ti* / \**te-da*  
this Wera-GEN reindeer  
'this reindeer of Wera's'
- b. *Wera-h t'uku° te-da* / \**ti*  
Wera-GEN this reindeer-3SG  
'this reindeer of Wera's'

We call agreement-controlling possessors **prominent internal possessors (PIPs)**.

### Today's talk

In spite of their DP-internal position PIPs show at least two clause-level properties

**A** The distribution of PIPs is restricted by other third person DPs in the clause (§3)

**B** PIPs can act as switch-reference pivots (§4)

→ We derive **A** as an effect of an **obviation system** in TN

– PIPs are **proximate**

– They compete with other proximate DPs and cannot co-occur with them

→ We derive **B** from the **position of PIPs in the DP**

– PIPs can c-command out of SpecDP

– This allows them to control out of the DP

## 2 Evidence for internal possession in TN

Low possessors and PIPs are DP-internal: they cannot be separated from the possessed noun by adverbs, (3a); they appear as a constituent under contrastive focus, (3b); and they can be coordinated with other NPs, (3c).

- (3) a. (*yetr'i*) [ *Wera-h* (*\*yetr'i*) *te-x'nəq-ta* ] *to°-dəm-c°*  
 always Wera-GEN always reindeer-LOC.PL-3SG come-1SG-PST  
 'I (always) arrived on Wera's reindeer.' (Nikolaeva 2014: 144)
- b. [ *Pet'a-h* *ńa-m-ta* ] *yad°btaə-d°m*, *Maša-m* *ńi-w°*  
 Petya-GEN friend-ACC-3SG meet-1SG Masha-ACC NEG-1SG.SBJ>SG.OBJ  
 'I met Petya's friend, not Masha.'
- c. [ *Pet'a-h* *ńa-da* *təd'ekəxət°* *pidər°* ] *to°-d'ih*  
 Petya-GEN friend-3SG then 2SG come-2DU  
 'Petya's friend and you came (together).'

External possession involves topicalisation and is only possible with subjects, (4a); objects cannot host external possessors, (4b).

- (4) a. *Wera-h* *t'ėńana* [<sub>SBJ</sub> *ńabako-da* ] *xal'a-də-mi* *ta-s°*  
 Wera-GEN yesterday elder.sister-3SG fish-PRED-ACC.1SG give-PST  
 'As for Wera, his sister gave me some fish.'
- b.\*? *Wera-h* *t'ėńana* [<sub>OBJ</sub> *ńabako-m-ta* ] *ladorŋa-dəm-s°*  
 Wera-GEN yesterday elder.sister-ACC-3SG beat-1SG-PST  
 intended: 'As for Wera, I beat up his sister yesterday.' (Nikolaeva 2014: 222)

### 3 The distribution of PIPs

The distribution of PIPs is restricted by other third person DPs in the clause. PIPs cannot co-occur with the following types of DPs:

1. Third person subjects (unless they host the PIP), see (5)
2. Third person objects triggering agreement on the verb (unless they host the PIP), see (6)
3. Free-standing third person pronouns, see (7)

In (5a), with a first person subject, the object can appear with a regular possessor or a PIP. In (5b), with a third person subject, a PIP is ungrammatical.

- (5) a. **First person subject** compatible with PIP

*məń°* [<sub>OBJ</sub> *Wera-h ti-m / te-m-ta* ] *ladə°-d°m*  
 1SG Wera-GEN reindeer-ACC reindeer-ACC-3SG hit-1SG  
 ‘I hit Wera’s reindeer.’

- b. **Third person subject** incompatible with PIP

*Maša* [<sub>OBJ</sub> *Wera-h ti-m / \*te-m-ta* ] *ladə°*  
 Masha Wera-GEN reindeer-ACC reindeer-ACC-3SG hit.3SG  
 ‘Masha hit Wera’s reindeer.’

In (6a), a regular lexical possessor co-occurs with object agreement on the verb. In (6b), a PIP is ungrammatical in the context of object agreement, even if the object is disjoint.

- (6) a. **Regular possessor** on subject compatible with **object agreement**

[<sub>SBJ</sub> *Wera-h né°ka* ] *lad°ə-da*  
 Wera-GEN brother hit-3SG.SBJ>SG.OBJ  
 ‘Wera<sub>i</sub>’s brother hit him/her<sub>\*i/\*j/k</sub>.’

- b. **PIP on subject** incompatible with **object agreement**

\*[<sub>SBJ</sub> *Wera-h né°ka-da* ] *lad°ə-da*  
 Wera-GEN brother-3SG hit-3SG.SBJ>SG.OBJ  
 intended: ‘Wera<sub>i</sub>’s brother<sub>j</sub> hit him/her<sub>k</sub>.’

- c. **PIP on object** compatible with **object agreement**

[<sub>OBJ</sub> *Wera-h ηəno-m-ta* ] *sulor-p’iwə-ś*  
 Wera-GEN boat-ACC-3SG fix-DUR.1SG.SBJ>SG.OBJ-PST  
 ‘I fixed Wera’s boat.’

(7) a. Implied object compatible with PIP

[<sub>OBJ</sub> *Pet'a-h* *né'ka-m* / *né'ka-m-ta* ] *ɲedaraə-d°m*  
 Petya-GEN brother-ACC brother-ACC-3SG send-PST.1SG

‘I sent Peter’s brother (to someone).’

b. **Free-standing third person pronoun** incompatible with PIP

[<sub>OBJ</sub> *Pet'a-h* *né'ka-m* / \**né'ka-m-ta* ] *ɲanta* *ɲedaraə-d°m*  
 Petya-GEN brother-ACC brother-ACC-3SG 3SG.DAT send-PST.1SG

‘I sent Peter’s brother to him/her.’

█ (5)–(7) do not look like binding violations, as there need not be coreference in the contexts that involve PIPs.

#### Interim summary: distribution of PIPs in the clause

- PIPs on the object are ungrammatical with third person subjects
- PIPs on subject are ungrammatical with third person object agreement on the verb
- PIPs cannot co-occur with free-standing third person pronouns (NOM, ACC or DAT)

### 3.1 Syntactic obviation

Given that the restrictions in (5)–(7) all depend on third person DPs, it is plausible that **obviation** is involved. Obviation governs the co-occurrence of third person DPs in a given syntactic domain (i.a. Dahlstrom 1986a,b, Jeanne & Hale 1987, Aissen 1997, Bruening 2001, Lochbihler 2012). In obviation systems, a single DP per clause can be proximate (“**Proximate Uniqueness**”).

Following Bruening (2001) we assume that a formal feature expresses the property of being proximate. We refer to this uninterpretable feature as [*uProx*].

The distribution of PIPs follows from a **syntactic obviation** system in the language, subject to Proximate Uniqueness (cf. Aissen 1997).



- Third person argument DPs can be assigned a [*uProx*] feature in syntax
- PIPs are **inherently** [*uProx*]
- [*uProx*] is unvalued and needs to agree with a head H (cf. Bruening 2001)
- Only one [*uProx*] feature can be valued in the syntax
- Cooccurrence of a PIP and another [*uProx*] DP leaves one feature unvalued

### 3.2 Assigning [*u*Prox]

Two factors determine which argument receives [*u*Prox] from the verb:

- Whether a DP is a pronoun or not
- The DP's syntactic height

In the case of pronouns, a third person pronoun is assigned [*u*Prox]:

- Presumably due to the inherent grammaticalised animacy of personal pronouns in TN
- If there are several third person pronouns, the highest is assigned [*u*Prox]

For third person lexical DPs, the highest lexical DP is assigned [*u*Prox]:

- Either a subject or an agreement-controlling ACC object is assigned [*u*Prox]

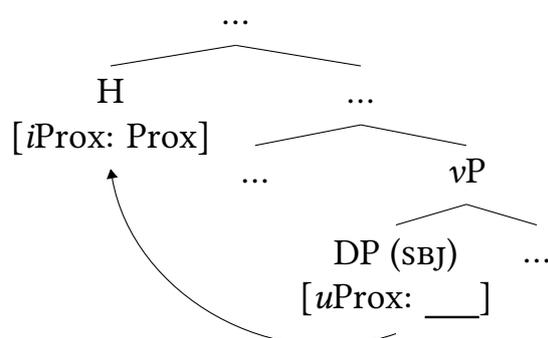
This matches observations by *i.a.* Dryer (1992), Aissen (1997) that animacy and grammatical function determine proximate status.

### 3.3 Deriving Proximate Uniqueness

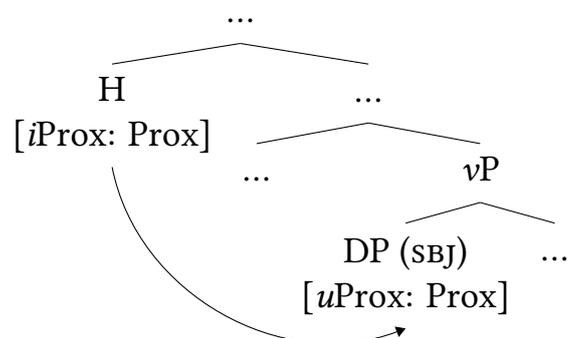
A functional head H below the CP domain carries [*i*Prox], the counterpart to [*u*Prox] (cf. Bruening 2001, Lochbihler 2012). We assume that DPs with an unvalued [*u*Prox] feature must enter a Reverse Agree relation (Zeijlstra 2012, Wurmbrand 2014) with H in order to value [*u*Prox], resulting in [*u*Prox: Prox], shown in (8b). H can value only one goal.

#### (8) Reverse Agree

a. Agree

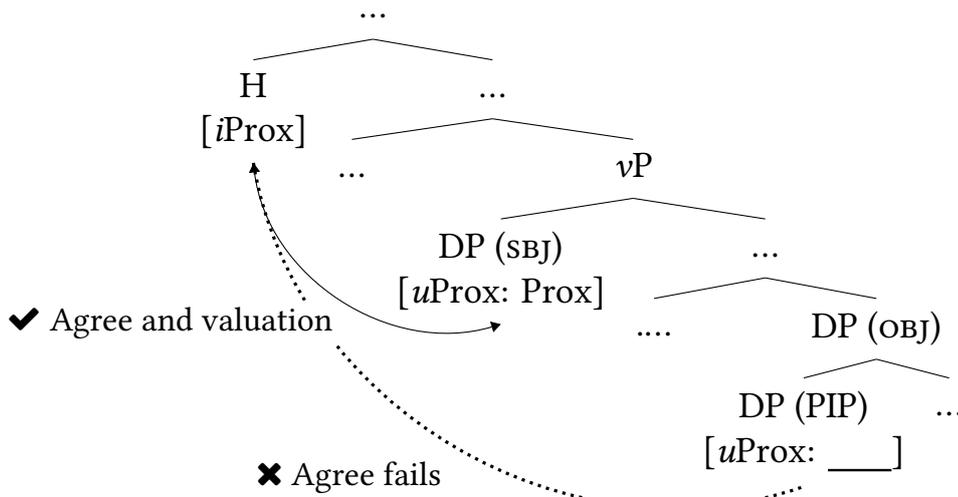


b. Valuation



We assume with Kalin (2018) (cf. also Pesetsky & Torrego 2007) that **uninterpretable and unvalued features crash the derivation** while uninterpretable valued features and interpretable features do not. This can derive Proximate Uniqueness, as shown in (9).

(9) Proximate Uniqueness: Higher [*uProx*] can agree, lower [*uProx*] remains unvalued



- The subject DP's [*uProx*] feature is valued by H
  - The [*uProx*] feature on the PIP of the object cannot get a value
- The derivation crashes because there is an unvalued uninterpretable feature
- The same result obtains whenever there are both a PIP and a third person subject, a third person object controlling verbal agreement or a third person pronoun in the clause; or when there are two PIPs: this accounts for (5), (6) and (7)
- ? Alternatively, if H can value several [*uProx*] features, these nominals should corefer (Aissen 1997) – this would lead to violations of binding principles in (5b), (6b) and (7b) (see §4)

#### 4 PIPs and switch-reference

PIPs but not low possessors can participate in 'non-canonical' switch-reference (SR) (Comrie 1983, Stirling 1993, Haspelmath 1995, McKenzie 2012, de Sousa 2016). The converb in  $-(\acute{s}/\acute{c})^\circ$  is a same subject-converb (ss) when the subject of the converbial clause is null, see (10), (11). The main clause subject controls the embedded null subject; the the subject's low possessor cannot.

(10) [ *tol<sup>o</sup>-h*    *t'ax<sup>o</sup>na* *ηamt<sup>o</sup>-<sup>o</sup>* ] *Wera* *Pet'a-m*    *məneqηa*  
 table-GEN at    sit-SS.CVB    Wera    Petya-ACC    see.3SG  
 'Wera<sub>i</sub> saw Petya<sub>j</sub> while  $\emptyset_{i/*j}$  sitting at the table.'

(11) [ *tol<sup>o</sup>-h*    *t'ax<sup>o</sup>na* *ηamt<sup>o</sup>-<sup>o</sup>* ] *Wera-h*    *nīša* *Pet'a-m*    *məneqηa*  
 table-GEN at    sit-SS.CVB    Wera-GEN father Petya-ACC    see.3SG  
 'Wera<sub>i</sub>'s father<sub>j</sub> saw Petya<sub>k</sub> while  $\emptyset_{*i/j/*k}$  sitting at the table.'    (Nikolaeva 2014: 378)

A PIP of the subject, however, *can* control the subject of a converbial clause.

- In (12), the possessor precedes the demonstrative, so must be a PIP
- The null subject of the converbial clause corefers with the main clause subject's possessor

(12) **PIP** controls coreference

*Pet'a-h t'uku° ηx̄-da yeś'ma [ tol°-h t'ax°na ηamt'o° ]*  
 Petya-GEN this leg-3SG.POSS start.hurting.3SG table-GEN at sit-SS.CVB  
 'This leg of **Petya<sub>i</sub>'s** started hurting when **he<sub>i</sub>** was sitting at the table.'

- This is a **morphosyntactic**, not a pragmatic restriction
  - With low possessors, coreference controlled by possessors is impossible, cf. (13)
  - We assume the subject of the converb to be PRO (cf. Sundaresan & McFadden 2009, McFadden & Sundaresan 2018, Nikolaeva & Bárány to appear, Göksel & Öztürk to appear)
- Cannot be logophoric (Williams 1992, Sichel 2010) or non-obligatory control (Landau 2013)

(13) a. Coreference controlled by **possessed noun**

# [ *tol°-h t'ax°na ηamt'o°* ] *ηáceki°-h kniga mən°tey°-q*  
 table-GEN at sit-SS.CVB child-GEN book fall-REFL.3SG  
 'Sitting at the table, the child's **book** fell.'

b. Coreference controlled by **PIP**

[ *tol°-h t'ax°na ηamt'o°* ] *ηáceki°-h kniga-da mən°tey°-q*  
 table-GEN at sit-SS.CVB child-GEN book-3SG.POSS fall-REFL.3SG  
 'When **it<sub>i</sub>** was sitting at the table, **the child<sub>i</sub>'s** book fell.' (Nikolaeva 2014: 380)

#### 4.1 Coreference and binding relations

In Serbo-Croatian, possessors of subjects cannot corefer with objects in the same clause:

(14) Serbo-Croatian (Despić 2013: 245)

- a. \* *Kusturicin<sub>i</sub> najnoviji film ga<sub>i</sub> je zaista razočarao.*  
 Kusturica's latest film him is really disappointed  
 'Kusturica<sub>i</sub>'s latest film really disappointed him<sub>i</sub>.'
- b. \* *Jovanov<sub>i</sub> papagaj ga<sub>i</sub> je juče ugrizao.*  
 John's parrot him is yesterday bitten  
 'John<sub>i</sub>'s parrot bit him<sub>i</sub> yesterday.'

Possessors of subjects can, however, bind possessive pronouns embedded in the object DP:

(15) Serbo-Croatian (Despić 2013: 259)

*Jovanon<sub>v</sub><sub>i</sub> papagaj je juče ugrizao [OBJ *njegovog<sub>i</sub>* brata ].*  
 John's parrot is yesterday bitten his brother  
 'John<sub>i</sub>'s parrot bit his<sub>i</sub> brother yesterday.'

! (14) cannot be tested in Tundra Nenets because of obviation... but (15) can. PIPs in Tundra Nenets resemble Serbo-Croatian possessors in this respect.

(16) a. **Possessed noun** can bind null possessive pronoun

*Wera-h *ńe°ka* [OBJ *weńako-m-ta* ] ńawla°*  
 Wera-GEN brother dog-ACC-3SG fed  
 'Wera<sub>i</sub>'s **brother<sub>j</sub>** fed **his/her<sub>\*i/j/k</sub>** dog.'

b. **Overt possessive pronoun** has free reference

*Maša-h wēsako [OBJ *pida xər°-m-ta* ] xana°*  
 Masha-GEN husband he knife-ACC-3SG take  
 'Masha<sub>i</sub>'s husband<sub>j</sub> took **his/her<sub>\*i/j/k</sub>** knife.'

(Nikolaeva 2014: 392)

• PIPs can corefer with both null and overt possessive pronouns, see (17)

(17) a. **PIP** corefers with null possessive pronoun

*Wera-h *ńe°ka-da* [OBJ *weńako-m-ta* ] ńawla°*  
 Wera-GEN brother-3SG dog-ACC-3SG fed  
 'Wera<sub>i</sub>'s brother<sub>j</sub> fed **his<sub>i/j/k</sub>** dog.'

b. **PIP** corefers with overt possessive pronoun

*Wera-h *ńabako-da* [OBL *pida ńa-k°nanata* ] yiľe°*  
 Wera-GEN sister-3SG 3SG tent-LOC.3SG live  
 'Wera<sub>i</sub>'s sister<sub>j</sub> lives in **his/her<sub>i/\*j/k</sub>** tent.'

(Nikolaeva 2014: 392)

### Interim summary: PIPs in DP

PIPs show distinct syntactic behaviour from low possessors

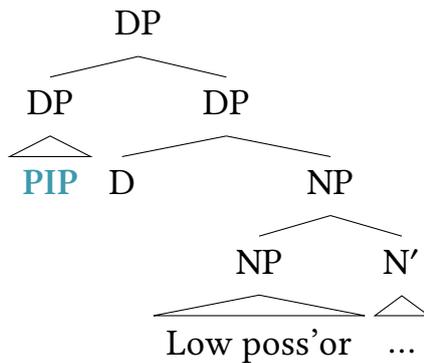
- Switch-reference: PIPs can control embedded subjects
- Coreference: PIPs corefer with possessive pronouns in other arguments
- ? PIPs can even corefer with null possessors, which subjects cannot...

## 4.2 Analysis: PIPs controlling PRO

Assuming that PIPs are adjoined to the DP (cf. Despić 2013) and ...

- ... thus not fully contained in the DP (May 1985, Chomsky 1986, Kayne 1994),
- ... PIPs can c-command out of DP from this position.

## (18) Position of PIPs in the Tundra Nenets DP



The structure in (18) allows PIPs to c-command out of DP, thus bind pronouns in other arguments and act as controllers of PRO following Landau's (2013) definitional criteria of obligatory control:

- PRO must interpreted as bound by the controller and
- the controller of PRO must be a codependent of the clause hosting PRO
- ✓ Null subjects of converbial clauses are bound by the main clause subject or its PIP
- ✓ PIPs behave like arguments of the main clause w.r.t. obviation, i.e. "codependents" (§3)

### Conclusions

PIPs are DP-internal possessors in Tundra Nenets

- Their distribution is restricted by other third person DPs
- ✓ We suggest this is a consequence of a **syntactic obviation system**
  - PIPs of subjects control null subjects of converbial clauses
- ✓ We suggest that this follows from their adjoined position to DP
- ✓ PIPs can c-command out of the DP and control PRO
- ? Link to obviation: if two proximate DPs must corefer (Aissen 1997), ...
- PIPs violate Principles B/C if there is another third person proximate DP

## Acknowledgements — Abbreviations — References

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